

PRESENTING RACE AND SLAVERY AT HISTORIC SITES

Manassas National Battlefield Park

**A Cooperative Research Project between the
National Park Service and the
Center for the Study of Public Culture and Public History of
The George Washington University**



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CONTENTS

1. Project Description and Objectives	2
2. Methodology	3
3. Interpretive Practices at Manassas	5
4. Results of Visitor Surveys	11
5. Results of Staff Surveys	13
6. Conclusion: Observations, Analysis and Recommendations	16
7. Appendices	21

Title page image: Foundation of the Robinson House

I. Project Description and Objectives

National Park Service officials have urged U.S. Civil War sites to examine, interpret and display the causes of the Civil War as well as their broader social implications.¹ In other words, battlefield parks like Gettysburg and Manassas should commemorate Civil War battles along with the social histories that place the war within a larger historical context. Presentations of social histories and issues --such as slavery and community life before, during, and after the Civil War--should not detract from reinterpretations of battles. Instead, a display of social histories can ensure that complex socio-economic issues related to battlefield sites are viewed and understood by the general public who flock to Civil War attractions.

The “Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites” project is one attempt to assist frontline staff, historians and interpreters in exhibiting social histories and issues related to the development of national park sites. This project was designed to analyze the presentation and interpretation of slavery and race at three historic sites: Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial; Frederick Douglass National Historic Site; and Manassas National Battlefield Park.² These three sites were selected because they represent three different kinds of historic places that involve the subject of race and slavery: the home of a revered leader and general, the home of a prominent African American leader, and a Civil War battlefield.

“Presenting Race and Slavery at Historic Sites” is a research project conducted under a cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the Center for the Study of

¹ Dwight Pitcaithley, chief historian, is cited in Matthew Reeves, “Reinterpreting Manassas: The Nineteenth-Century African American Community at Manassas National Battlefield Park,” *Historical Archaeology*, 2003, 37 (3): 124. See also, *Interpretation at Civil War Sites: A Report to Congress*, National Park Service, March 2000 at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/icws/index.htm accessed December 9, 2005.

² In January 2006, the Frederick Douglass NHS was replaced by Harpers Ferry National Historical Park due to scheduling conflicts.

Public Culture and History of The George Washington University. To examine the displays of race and slavery at these historic places, researchers have conducted surveys of site interpreters and visitors to record their perceptions of how race and slavery are currently presented. Preliminary research for this project began in 2003 and has continued through 2005. The installment of surveys at Manassas National Battlefield Park was conducted from April 2005 to June 2005.

II. Methodology

Data for this project was collected by: 1) observing and recording current interpretive practices at Manassas National Battlefield Park, 2) conducting face-to-face surveys with visitors and 3) interviewing the Manassas staff. Survey questions were based on independent surveys previously conducted at similar kinds of historic sites (Monticello-The Home of Thomas Jefferson, Gettysburg National Military Park, and Colonial Williamsburg) during 1997-99. These surveys were led by the principal investigator, Dr. James Horton of The George Washington University, and developed in consultation with a social scientist. With the input from Manassas staff, the GWU Center for Public Culture and History and the NPS Social Science Program, new survey questions were adapted for Manassas National Battlefield Park (see Appendix A). The surveys were conducted and recorded by the on-site coordinator and researcher, Sandra R. Heard, a George Washington University graduate student.

Much of the data on interpretations of race and slavery at Manassas was gathered from 10-12 minute manually recorded interviews with visitors of varied backgrounds. The original goal of surveying 70% (or 58) of 84 randomly approached visitors was not achieved during visits to the site. Instead, researchers successfully surveyed approximately 46% (or

38) of 83 visitors who were approached on the grounds of the park. Visitors, 18 years and older, were interviewed at the entrances and exits of the Visitor Center and at the edges of the site's main parking lot, located in front of the Visitor Center. Interviewers recorded on a log sheet observational information about each visitor approached. Observational information includes the size of the party approached, the presence of children, and gender.

The on-site coordinator and researcher Sandra R. Heard also surveyed Manassas frontline staff to gather additional information regarding current interpretive practices at the site. In addition, educational practices were observed and recorded during four visits to the park from February 2005 to May 2005. During an initial visit to the historic site, Ms. Heard met with Superintendent Robert Sutton to discuss the details of the project, visit the Visitor Center and tour the park grounds. While there, Sutton provided a brief tour of key exhibits at the center and discussed the objectives of Manassas Park. Interviews with site interpreters, Tim Nosal and Jim Burgess, were also instrumental in providing vital information about ongoing interpretive practices at the historic battlefield.

The surveys were designed to elicit the personal opinions and ideas from interviewees about how race and slavery are presented at Manassas. With these surveys, the research team was able to gather qualitative data that can be used to assist park interpreters in evaluating visitor reception of current interpretive programs at Manassas. Many visitors to Manassas use the park to exercise, walk the grounds, or visit without a tour. The survey elicits responses from all visitors, with the understanding that they may not have participated in a guided tour, but use the signage and brochures made available to them. While the staff at Manassas expressed their preference to consider the important question, "Is slavery one of the primary interpretive themes for this park?", the purpose of this visitor survey is focused

on the existing content of interpretive material at the park. The NPS document *Interpretation at Civil War Sites: A Report to Congress* indicates that all parks related to the Civil War, particularly the battlefields, should provide the broadest context of that war.³

In addition, the information gathered from these surveys can be used to assist park interpreters in evaluating the effectiveness of existing educational programs at a popular Civil War site. Finally, the data gathered from these surveys can be used to enhance interpreter training programs and develop the content of educational programs at Manassas National Battlefield Park. Visitor surveys were designed to elicit responses related to the following:

1. Parts of the site toured, visited
2. Perceptions of park experiences as related to interpretations of slavery and race
3. Opinions on park management's approach to addressing race and slavery at the site
4. Whether or not visitors learned about the causes of the Civil War from the site
5. Whether or not visitors learned *anything new* about the causes of the Civil War
6. Whether or not visitors learned anything about slavery from these site
7. Whether or not the subject of slavery was adequately portrayed at the site

Site interpreter surveys were developed to gather the following information:

1. Staff person's educational and employment background, and experience at the site
2. Explanation of their role as a site interpreter and what they feel are the major objectives and messages of site interpretation
3. Staff person's perspective on how slavery is addressed and represented
4. Whether or not the subject of slavery is adequately portrayed

³ *Interpretation at Civil War Sites: A Report to Congress*, National Park Service, March 2000 at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/icws/index.htm accessed December 9, 2005.

5. Staff person's comfort level in talking to the public about race and slavery
6. Staff person's insight as to how historical interpretation could be enhanced

III. Interpretive Practices at Manassas

According to Manassas staff interviewed, the primary objective of the park's interpretive programming is to commemorate the Civil War battles that took place at the site.⁴ Therefore, most of the park's educational presentations and materials are geared towards interpreting the two battles fought at Manassas in 1861 and 1862. Current exhibits at the park's Visitor Center feature war strategies, artillery, uniforms, routes taken by military units, and variety of equipment used by soldiers. In addition, most of the interpretive signs on the park grounds display battle strategies, war casualties, and key war commanders. Manassas also dedicates a portion of its interpretive materials to the James Robinson site which features material culture and photos of the home of a prominent African American family who lived on the site before, during, and after the Civil War. As well, information on the Henry Family (an Anglo-American family who also lived on the site before and during the war) can be found at the Visitor Center and Henry House site, located approximately 600 feet northwest of the center. Although Manassas provides information on the Henry and Robinson families, some observers of the site's interpretive practices have asserted that current educational materials do not adequately capture community life that existed at Manassas before, during, and after the Civil War. As well, scholars have pointed out that the

⁴ Interview with Tim Nosal, Education Specialist at Manassas National Battlefield Park, June 8, 2005; Interview with James Burgess, Museum Specialist at Manassas National Battlefield Park, June 10, 2005.

park does not effectively demonstrate how plantation slavery was integral to the economy of the Manassas homesteads and the antebellum South in general.⁵

Despite critiques of the park's interpretive practices, the Manassas staff has made considerable efforts to remind the general public that slavery was a prime catalyst of the Civil War. The park staff has dedicated a portion of its educational materials to show that enslaved and free African Americans were present on the site during the battles of Manassas. Currently, visitors can have glimpses of slavery and African American life in select Visitor Center exhibits, in the film, *Manassas: End of Innocence*, and see an interpretive sign located adjacent to the James Robinson House site. Below is a more detailed account of the park's existing interpretations of slavery and race observed by Sandra R. Heard, research and on-site coordinator of the surveys for this project.

During a visit to the Manassas National Battlefield Park in February 2005, researcher Sandra Heard toured the Visitor Center's museum. While there, she observed two museum panels (located to the right of the museum entry doors) that explicitly discuss slavery and state sovereignty. The "Institution of Slavery" panel includes an excerpt from a letter written by Thomas Jefferson stating the former president's belief that slavery was immoral along with his dismay that emancipation could potentially destroy the country. This panel also includes a graphic from an 1856 edition of the *London Illustrated News* that shows the spectacle of the open slave trade in a crowded town square. A second museum panel, "The

⁵ Matthew Reeves, "Reinterpreting Manassas: The Nineteenth-Century African American Community at Manassas National Battlefield Park," *Historical Archaeology*, 2003, 37 (3): 125; Paul Shackel. *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003; Daphne C. Dador, "Manassas National Battlefield Park: Background Information Report," Preliminary Research Report, National Park Service, National Center for Cultural Resources, Office of Diversity & Special Projects, August 2003, p. 7. More specifically, Reeves asserts that there is very little interpretation devoted to the history of slavery and African American life because of the historical beginnings and core objective of the battlefield park in which the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of the Confederacy worked to create a battlefield park to commemorate the Confederate soldiers who fought in the battles of Manassas.



Fig. 1. Museum exhibit panel, “The Institution of Slavery” inside the visitor’s center.

Unresolved Question of Slavery,” asks, “Did sovereignty lie with the states? Could the government be dissolved?” (Figure 1) Underneath the text of this panel, an advertisement from an 1835 Charleston newspaper announces the prices and descriptions of enslaved blacks who were to be sold in the slave market.

Within the museum, there is an exhibit dedicated to the Robinson family and home site—the original building is no longer extant. The display includes an etched drawing of the house as it appeared in the mid-19th century and showcases artifacts related to the house's use as a hospital during the Civil War. As well, the Robinson exhibit states that “Jim Robinson was a free black man who sent his wife and children to a neighboring house where they hid

in its cellar. Family tradition holds that after getting some valuables, Robinson took refuge under the turnpike bridge at Young's Branch.” The museum also displays information about other individuals, such as James and Fanny Ricketts, a Union general and his wife, and Judith Carter Henry and Wilmer McLean – two prominent figures of the Manassas community in the 19th century. However, the vast majority of the museum's displays showcase artifacts related to the battles: guns, flags, swords, drums, shoes, ammunition, canteens and miniatures of soldiers in a variety of uniforms.⁶

After Ms. Heard toured the museum, she viewed the Visitor Center's film, *Manassas: End of Innocence*. The film poignantly captures the uncertainty and fear of ordinary soldiers and their families, features enslaved African Americans, and details the strategies and horrors of the two battles at Manassas. Some of the voices captured in the film include: a female member of the Henry family who reflects on the disastrous effects that the war will have on the Manassas community and a black servant who speaks about how he perceives the significance of the battles. The film attempts to give some insight on the reasons that Confederate and Union soldiers fought at Manassas. In a scene that depicts the capture of a Union soldier, Confederate soldiers assert that the North waged war to “liberate the Negro” and that southern troops fought to “protect their homes” and “preserve their way of life.” At the closing of the film, the narrator discusses the meaning of the battles from Abraham Lincoln's perspective: Lincoln ultimately waged war on southern states because he believed that freeing the slaves meant freedom for all U.S. citizens. For Lincoln, the emancipation of

⁶ Manassas staff has indicated that 20% of available museum staff is dedicated to slavery and the Robinson family story: “The problem is that there are hardly any artifacts in existence related to the Robinsons or other local African American families.... The bulk of the museum's collection is related to military history, which is a primary interpretive theme for this park.” Comments on Draft Report from Manassas staff, September 2005.

enslaved African Americans was key to the overall survival and prosperity of a fledgling nation.

Ms. Heard also met with Superintendent Robert Sutton who confirmed the main objective of the park's interpretive programming: to educate the public about the two battles of Manassas. But Sutton revealed upfront that the park developed the two museum panel on slavery and states' rights as a result of Sutton's conversation with Jesse Jackson, Jr. Sutton was encouraged by Jackson to display educational materials showing that slavery was a prime cause of the battles at Manassas. Sutton also gave background information about the development of the displays on Judith Carter Henry, Wilmer McLean and James Robinson. He reported that descendants of the Robinson family collaborated with Manassas staff to tell the story of the Robinsons at the park. Members of the Robinson family have provided artifacts and transcripts related to the Robinson home site. While the Robinson family story has been passed down through oral tradition, and the artifacts and information in the exhibits are authentic and verifiable, some information cannot be substantiated through documentary evidence. Therefore, the park has not included many of these stories in its interpretation. Sutton also reported that the park is currently working with architects to design a "ghost structure" for the Robinson site.⁷

After meeting with Superintendent Sutton, Ms. Heard browsed titles offered at the Visitor Center's bookstore and walked to the James Robinson house site, located approximately 800 yards northeast of the Visitor Center. The bookstore offers a variety of Civil War histories as well as books on black Civil War soldiers and African American

⁷ Comments on Draft Report from Manassas staff, September 2005. By ghost structure, Sutton means that architects will design and provide specifications for a steel or wood framed structure that outlines the footprint of the original James Robinson house. The familiar problem of finding funds to rehabilitate structures was discussed and Sutton indicated that they do what they can to locate funding to complete projects to fully convey the history of the battlefield site.

history. At the entry foyer of the store, there is one visible title on black soldiers. If the visitor travels to the far side of the store (towards the exit door), he will find a “General Interest” section that offers books on slavery, black soldiers, and renowned personalities such as Frederick Douglass.

A partial foundation remains of the Robinson house that was destroyed by arsonists in the early 1990s. (Figure 2) There are three interpretive outdoor signs (waysides), one at the site and one each on opposing trails leading to the site. From the park management perspective, waysides are meant to be helpful while not being intrusive upon the landscape. The researcher, however, found difficult to locate the site and that the walk to the former Robinson homestead is poorly marked. The text from one of the waysides is included in Appendix E.



Fig. 2. A wayside provides information and an image of the Robinson house before it had burned down.

IV. Results of Visitor Surveys

During April 2005 – May 2005, researchers of the “Presenting Race and Slavery” project randomly approached 83 visitors and successfully surveyed approximately 46% (or 38) visitors who participated in self-guided tours of the Visitor Center, guided tours and/or solely walked the park grounds. From observations and conversations with visitors, researchers discovered that many inhabitants of the Manassas area regularly visit the park for recreational use. As well, Manassas receives a number of repeat visitors who simply walk the grounds but select not to use the Visitor Center or to participate in guided tours offered by the park. The majority of the visitors surveyed for this project either visited the Visitor Center or walked the grounds immediately surrounding the center without a guide. Only 2 of the 38 visitors surveyed participated in a guided tour. Twenty-eight visitors toured the Visitor Center exhibits; 22 visitors toured the Henry house site; 29 chose to walk the park grounds, 12 selected to view the film, and 7 visitors traveled to the James Robinson house site. The table above is a summary of selected questions from the survey. The entire survey questions are included in the Appendix.

Most visitors surveyed believe that slavery should be interpreted in some fashion at Manassas. When asked if the topic of slavery should be presented in more or less detail at Manassas (question 8), 23 visitors responded “more detail,” 8 responded that existing references to or interpretations of slavery were adequate and 7 did not answer this question. However, 6 of the respondents who chose not to answer this question provided comments that further illustrate what some visitors expect from interpretive programming at Manassas. The responses include: 1) “This park can do a lot more [to improve] all interpretive materials. But don’t take away from battlefield site;” 2) “Emphasis here is the battlefield,

Visitor Survey Questions**Number of Responses**

Question Number	Yes	No	No Answer
3a. Did you learn anything about slavery during your visit?	11	27	0
6a. Did you hear or read about the causes of the Civil War at this park?	12	26	0
6b. Did you learn new information about the causes of the Civil War?	3	24	11
7. In your opinion, was the topic of slavery adequately portrayed at this park?	5	19	14*

*Note that of the 14 visitors who opted not to answer no or yes to this question, 7 responded that the purpose of Manassas Park was to interpret or exhibit information related to the Civil War battles fought at the site, not to provide displays, data or educational materials on slavery. Two visitors responded that interpretations of slavery were not adequate on the park grounds, but did not make comments regarding interpretive practices in the Visitor Center. In addition, five of the 14 respondents stated that they could not remember what current exhibits at the Visitor Center stated about slavery.

slavery not relevant;” 3) “Purpose of coming here is to see logistics of the battles. But slavery can’t be less emphasized;” 4) “Would like to know more about it [slavery];” 5) “Wouldn’t say that any less [related to slavery] needs to be shown, but if there’s something directly linked to Manassas then it should be added;” and 6) “Let sleeping dogs lie.” One respondent chose not to answer question 8 because he “felt uncomfortable answering the question.” Of the 23 visitors who responded that the subject of slavery should be presented in “more detail,” one added that interpretive programming “[s]hould say why battle took place,

not just how.” Another visitor noted that it is “[v]ery important for kids to learn about slavery. Kids should get more detailed information about the causes of the war, not only information about battles, but also the changes that occurred as a result of the Civil War.” A third visitor responded, “Given the central role of slavery, it should be portrayed more inside buildings, walking tours. Not practical on placards on outside grounds.”

Despite the expressed perception that there is a lack of detailed information about slavery at Manassas, visitors indicated that the historical information that they do receive is of a high quality: 50% of the respondents rated the historic information presented at the site as “very good” to “excellent” and 50% of the respondents rated the historic information presented as “good” to “average.” Note that none of the visitors surveyed responded that the historic information presented at Manassas was “poor.”

V. Results of Staff Surveys

On June 8, 2005, Education Specialist Tim Nosal participated in a phone interview and gave insight on his responsibilities as developer of educational programming and his views on current interpretive practices at the site. Nosal has worked at Manassas National Battlefield Park over the past three years and since his tenure, he has been responsible for developing educational tours for school groups, grant writing, and updating educational programs and interpretative media. When asked what he believed were the major objectives of interpretive programs at Manassas, Nosal reported that the prime objective of the site was to relay and display the history of the two battles at Manassas. However, he also added that other objectives of the park include: 1) interpreting and conveying information on the lives

and experiences of citizens who lived at site at the time of battles, as well as 2) educating the public about the history of the park and the first human interactions up to the time of battles.

When discussing interpretations of slavery, Nosal stated that slavery is not adequately portrayed at the site, but that educational programming was growing and improving. Nosal also mentioned that he currently provides tours and information related to the Jim Robinson, Portico and Carter (Pittsylvania) sites to high school groups who have requested educational tours and programming on this subject matter. Nosal reported that he would develop more programming on slavery, race and African American life at Manassas if there were more resources (mainly more staff) to assist with enhancing educational programs and materials. As well, he reported that the park plans to hire an intern in late August to help with educational materials and interpretive programming at the site. With the aid of the intern, Nosal stated that he hopes to implement new educational programming by Fall 2005.

Nosal reported that he felt very comfortable presenting information on race and slavery. However, he also asserted that: "Interpretations around slavery should be developed in correct context and geared towards the appropriate audience or tour group." "For example," Nosal reported, "when developing programs for civilians, interpretations of slavery are important and necessary. When covering the causes of the Civil War, discussions of slavery are key, vital. However, when talking about why the battles were fought or covering battle strategies, a discussion of slavery is an issue, but not necessarily a prime issue." According to Nosal, an opportunity for educating the general public about slavery and African American history could be found at the Manassas website. Currently there is information on the Robinson House site, black soldiers in Civil War battles, and African American households and life at Manassas. Finally, Nosal stated that he is in the process of

revising the website and plans to provide updated information on slavery, race, and African American life at Manassas.

On June 10, 2005, Museum Specialist Jim Burgess elected to manually complete a site interpreter survey. Mr. Burgess has worked at Manassas for 25 years, initially as an interpretive ranger and later as the park's museum specialist. When asked about the major objectives of the park, Burgess wrote, "Our primary objective is to interpret the two battles fought here and convey to the public why these battles were significant events in American history." Burgess also reported that his primary responsibilities include: providing tours of the battlefield to military groups, giving talks and short tours to the public, and assisting the park's black powder safety officer with living history weapons demonstrations. Burgess stated that he did not present information on slavery at Manassas. However, he mentioned that the Visitor Center's museum exhibit currently displays panels that discuss slavery and its role in fueling the Civil War.

According to Burgess, he has seldom felt the need to discuss slavery at the site "unless in response to an occasional visitor question." When asked about additional comments on interpretations of slavery at Manassas, Burgess stated, "If the public is bombarded with the same interpretation of slavery at all the parks, those parks will lose some of their individuality and significance... There are much better places than Manassas to effectively address the issue of slavery (such as Harpers Ferry, Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, and Frederick Douglass). Enhance discussions of slavery at those locations if necessary."

VI. Conclusion: Observations, Analysis and Recommendations

During conversations with Manassas staff from February 2005 to June 2005, it is clear that site interpreters view the core objective of Manassas Battlefield Park as to educate the general public about the two Civil War battles fought at the site in 1861 and 1862. Yet from conversations with Sutton, Nosal, and Burgess, we also find that some of the park's staff agree with the concept of portraying slavery as a prime cause of the Civil War. With this in mind, the Park should be commended for including the interpretive displays on slavery and states' rights in the Visitor Center museum. In addition, the park's staff has done a good job of including slavery as an important social issue related to the Manassas battles in the film, *Manassas: End of Innocence*. Finally, since the first draft of this report, the park has added more information about African American life on its website.⁸

However, the visitor survey suggests that the link between slavery and the battlefield site is not being adequately relayed to visitors of the park. The survey responses show that 70% of visitors surveyed reported that they did not learn anything about slavery at the site. The remaining 30% who stated that they did learn something about slavery indicated that they had learned this information from the Visitor Center exhibits and film. Also note that 50% of the visitors interviewed believe slavery is not adequately portrayed and 60% thought slavery should be interpreted in "more detail" at the park site.

Most likely, visitors are missing the interpretations about slavery because its location is concentrated in the Visitor Center. The Robinson House site, museum exhibit, and the film are the three interpretive venues that currently provide glimpses of how slavery and African American life were present on the Manassas site during the time of the battles.

⁸ See the virtual exhibit, "Lost, Tossed, and Found" at: <http://www.nps.gov/rap/exhibit/mana/text/ltf00.htm>, accessed December 9, 2005.

However, 76% of the visitors surveyed spent much of their time walking the park's grounds where there is very little interpretation of race and slavery. Furthermore, only 18% of visitors surveyed actually ventured to the Robinson House site and 31% watched the Visitor Center film.

Although the core objective of Manassas is to relay information about the battles fought in 1861 and 1862, those stories should be enhanced by the area's social history and broader context.⁹ While Manassas has worked to discuss slavery as a cause of the war and to address the 2000 Congressional directive to do so, current practices do not effectively portray community life that existed on the site before, during, or after the Civil War. As well, Manassas has not yet achieved the goal set in August 1998 by the NPS battlefield managers which states that: "battlefield interpretation must establish the site's particular place in the continuum of war; illuminate the social, economic and cultural issues that caused or were affected by the war [and] illustrate the breadth of human experience during the period."¹⁰

As is well documented by archeologists, plantation slavery and tenant farming were prevalent on the site before and during the Civil War. Along with being an important battlefield site, Manassas was also the home of European Americans, enslaved blacks, and free persons of color. Archeologists Laura Gaulke and Matthew Reeves point out that Manassas was the site of four prosperous plantations in the antebellum era: Portici, Pittsylvania, Brownsville and Hazel Plain (Chinn).¹¹ (Some of these archeological sites are

⁹ Park staff notes the primary interpretive theme for the park, military history, justifies the fact that the bulk of the museum collection is military and battle-related artifacts.

¹⁰ For more information on interpretations of Civil War sites, see: *Interpretation at Civil War Sites: A Report to Congress*, National Park Service, March 2000 at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/icws/index.htm accessed December 9, 2005, and Robert K. Sutton, ed., *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, National Park Service, 2001 at: http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/rthg/index.htm, accessed December 9, 2005.

¹¹ Matthew Reeves, "Reinterpreting Manassas: The Nineteenth-Century African American Community at Manassas National Battlefield Park," *Historical Archaeology*, pp. 127-130; Laura Gaulke, "Free within

interpreted on the park's website.) As well, these scholars confirm that there were a number of African American homesteads on the site from the mid to late 19th century.¹² As indicated by the visitor survey, respondents are favorably impressed by the historical interpretation at Manassas. This is an opportunity to capture visitors' attention by connecting existing interpretation about the battles to issues of slavery and the 19th century community that lived there in a logical way.

To ensure that the general public understands that Manassas was also the site of thriving plantations and communities of Anglo-Americans, enslaved blacks and free people of color, interpretive practices on the park grounds should be enhanced. As well, exhibits or brochures - dedicated to showing how slavery and African American life were also intricately tied to the site – could help the general public learn about the Manassas battles and their broader social implications. As previously stated in this report and confirmed by site interpreter and visitor surveys, educational programming on race and slavery should not detract from interpretations of battles. Instead, exhibits and interpretive signs on slavery, African American life, and race relations should provide the historical context for the battles at Manassas. Race and slavery interpretations can also help to ensure that complex socio-economic issues related to the war are understood by the general public. Some ways that Manassas Battlefield Park can begin to improve interpretations on race and slavery include:

1. Providing better signage on park grounds to encourage visitors to travel to the Robinson House site.

Ourselves,” *Archaeological Perspectives on the American Civil War*. Ed Clarence R. Geier and Stephen R. Potter. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, pp 253-268.

¹² Reeves, pp. 131-134; Gaulke, pp. 254-255.

2. Consider offering the film, *Manassas: End of Innocence*, free of charge to the general public. Many of the 11 visitors who confirmed that they learned about slavery reported that they watched the Visitor Center film.
3. Continue offering educational tours to high school groups regarding the Robinson Family homestead, Portici and Carter (Pittsylvania) plantations. Consider providing tours to the general public on plantation slavery and African American homesteads that existed on the site. These include the Pittsylvania, Portici, Brownsville and Hazel Plain (Chinn) plantations and the Phillip-Sarah Nash, Peters, Dean and Davis households. To develop educational programming on these sites, refer to reports developed by archeologists Matthew Reeves and Laura Gaulke.
4. Investigating if there is indeed a link between the Robinson and Henry-Carter families. If so, develop educational materials (exhibits, brochures) that reveal the story of Robinson-Carter families as well as provide more information on the Robinson Family in general. Because the park site is so keen to give background information on key persons associated with the battles and the site, it seems logical to include more information on the Robinsons. Note that on April 18, 2005, Manassas volunteer Robert L. Lane gave researchers a copy of a James Robinson brochure developed by the Mountain View Alternative High School. This brochure states that James Robinson was “a free African American born of a black slave and fathered by a white man named Landon Carter.” Manassas staff should consider verifying the information offered in this brochure and reproducing the existing brochure if the data

provided is historically accurate. Of course, staff could also develop new educational materials on the Robinsons while using some of the information already provided by Mountain View High School. Copy of brochure included in Appendix D.

Appendix A
Survey Questions for Visitors

1. What parts of the Manassas National Battlefield Park site did you visit today? (Select all that apply):
 - ☐ Visitor Center Exhibits
 - ☐ Visitor Center Film
 - ☐ Visitor Center Store
 - ☐ Henry House
 - ☐ James Robinson House
 - ☐ Walked the grounds
 - ☐ Guided tour
2. Have you visited this park before? ____ Yes ____ No
If yes, how often have you visited in the last two years? _____
3. a) During visit here today, did you learn anything about slavery? ____ Yes ____ No
b) Please explain what you read, heard, or saw about the subject of slavery during your visit today...
 - ☐ From Visitor Center Exhibits
 - ☐ From the Visitor Center Film
 - ☐ At the Visitor Center Store
 - ☐ On the outdoor grounds
4. If you visited the Robinson House site:
 - a) What were your first impressions of the site?
 - b) What did you learn from the Robinson House interpretive sign?
5. If you participated in a guided tour, did the guide answer your questions? Please Explain.
6. a) Did you hear or read about the causes of the Civil War at this park today?
____ Yes ____ No

If yes, what did you hear or read?

b) Did you learn new information about the causes of the Civil War during your visit here today? ____ Yes ____ No Please explain.
7. In your opinion, was the subject of slavery adequately portrayed at this park? ____ Yes ____ No Please explain.
8. Do you think that the topic of slavery should be presented in more detail at this park, or should slavery be emphasized less? Please explain.
 - ☐ More detail
 - ☐ Less emphasis

9. Did you visit the Visitor Center Book Store today? ____ Yes ____ No
If yes, did you see any books that you would like to read? Please explain.

10. Are you interested in reading more about slavery as it relates to Manassas National Battlefield Park, or about slavery in general? (check if “yes”)

- ☐ Manassas National Battlefield Park
- ☐ Slavery in general
- ☐ Other _____

11. Considering your experience here today, how would you rate...?:

a) The historic information presented

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very Good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Poor

b) Your learning experience

- ☐ Excellent
- ☐ Very Good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Poor

Appendix B
Survey Questions for Site Interpreters

1. Briefly, please tell me about yourself: your education, previous job experience, etc.
2. How long have you worked at the Manassas National Battlefield?
3. Please explain your job as an interpreter here.
4. What do you think are the major objectives of interpretation at Manassas?
5. What is your favorite aspect of the park?
6. Do you present material on the subject of slavery?
If yes, what aspects of slavery do you present to visitors?
7. Do you feel that slavery is a pertinent topic of interpretation this site?
8. Do you feel that the subject of slavery is adequately portrayed at this site?
9. How do you feel about presenting slavery to the public?
10. What is the most difficult question you have heard from a visitor?
11. What is the most rewarding experience you have had in your interaction with visitors here?
12. In your opinion, how can discussions of slavery be enhanced at Manassas?
13. Do you have any comments about the interpretation of slavery that you would like to add to this survey?

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol:

The interviewer will make a brief introduction to approach a visitor and invite them to participate in a face-to-face interview. Visitors who agree to participate will be further informed about the survey and its subject matter. Visitor's consent to be tape recorded must be confirmed. Interviewers must ask participants if they are over 18 years of age. In case a visitor does not wish to be tape recorded but would like to participate in the survey, interviewers can proceed and must record answers in writing. Inform the participant that the interview will take longer.

Introductory Statement to invite visitors to participate in a face-to face interview:

Approaching statement: Hello, I am a student with The George Washington University conducting a survey about the presentation of race and slavery at this site. This survey is a joint research project between the National Park Service and The George Washington University; the purpose of the survey is to learn visitors' opinions about interpretive programs. I will be asking you questions about how race and slavery are presented here. We are interested in your thoughts and would like to tape record your answers for accuracy. All of your answers are voluntary. This interview is anonymous so your answers are confidential. It should take approximately 10 minutes. The Paperwork Reduction Act requires approval of all federal government surveys by the Office of Management and Budget. This survey has been approved under this Act. The Office of Management and Budget control number and expiration date is available at your request. Additional information about this survey and its approval is available at your request.*

Would you be willing to participate in a short interview?

If yes, confirm that the participant is at least 18 years old. Continue with interview. Record observational information on the log sheet.

If no, stop the interview, thank the visitor, and record observational information on the log sheet.

Appendix D

The Robinson Home (Brochure, side 1)

Gentleman Jim Robinson's blood runs through many generations. Oswald Robinson (below), for example, is the great grandson of Jim Robinson and the storyteller for the Robinson's family history. Oswald Robinson spent over forty years teaching in Fairfax County where he was principal in the Fairfax County School System from 1965 to his retirement in 1970. Robinson passed away in January 2002 leaving behind many generations of Robinsons.



National Park Service Archives

Mary Robinson Ewell (shown below) is the great, great granddaughter of James Robinson. She is a Northern Virginia native and an employee at Mountain View High School.



Special thanks to . . .

The National Park Service

Manassas Battlefield

Robert Sutton, Superintendent

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James Burgess

Archaeology Division

Mountain View Alternative

Barbara Gernat, Principal

Geneva Lindner, American History

Sidney Brown, American Literature

Mary Ewell

The Students of Mountain View



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The Robinson Home

Gentleman Jim Robinson

*The story of a free
African-American*



National Park Service Archive

African-American History
at the Manassas Battlefield

Appendix D

Robinson Home (Brochure, side 2)

Gentleman Jim

James Robinson, also known as Gentleman Jim, was born free on Pennsylvania Plantation in Bull Run. He was a free African American born of a black slave and fathered by a white man named Landon Carter. Jim lived with the Carter family where he learned to read with Carter's two daughters. In 1847, he took his tutor's last name, Robinson. Jim received nine acres of land and operated a driver's tavern (a rest stop) located off Route 29. Eventually, he was able to buy his wife and children out of slavery.

The Robinson Family

Jim fell in love with Susan Gaskins, a slave who lived on a nearby plantation, Willow Farm. There is no official record that they were married because a free man could not marry a slave. As their union grew, so did the family. Jim and Susan had six children. The children took the

mother's status as a slave. The family later

was separated. Susan and daughter Jemima (shown in photo), along with daughter Jenny,

were freed after the death of their owner

John Lee. With Jim's hard work, he bought back his sons, Tasco and Bladen, but Alfred and James were sent to a plantation in the deep South. After the War, and with the freeing of slaves, Alfred was able to rejoin his family.

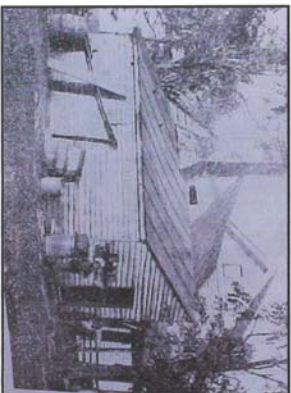


National Park Service Archive

The Robinson House and The Battle of Manassas

Gentleman Jim constructed a home on Henry Hill. During the Second Battle of Manassas, the house served as a Union field hospital and was used as the headquarters for Union commanders. Jim aided soldiers with what he could and then took refuge under the stone bridge. The rest of Jim's family was sent to their neighbor's house for safety. When the battle ended, Jim temporarily buried thirteen soldiers in his front yard and later participated in burying close to five hundred soldiers. Damages to the Robinson house were estimated at \$2,080. Congress granted \$1,249 for his losses.

As time passed, the house began to improve and the structure changed. In 1888, the Robinsons added an additional chimney to the house. Then in 1924, the house was sold to the Manassas Battlefield Park and continued as a historical landmark. vandalism resulted in a fire on July 27, 1993 that destroyed a majority of the structure. The original foundation remains.



National Park Service Archive

After its demolition, archeologists began to search and discovered more about its construction and its inhabitants. The remains of the original log cabin built in 1855 were discovered along with over one thousand artifacts, including papers dating from 1827-1860 written with the signature of Jim "Gentleman" Robinson. The artifacts are stored at the National Park Service in Maryland.



Photo by G. Linder, Mountain View School

Gentleman Jim died of heart disease on October 16, 1875, leaving behind 1500 acres, his wife Susan and several children. He played a major role in assisting the newly formed free African-Americans during reconstruction.

The Robinson house site provides a unique example of a free African-American domestic site, a cultural look into the past.

Appendix E

Visitors can learn some background information about James Robinson from the interpretive wayside which states:

The house of James Robinson – a freed slave – stood here at the time of the battle. That morning hundreds of Confederates streamed through the yard as they retreated for the Union attack. Surprisingly, the property suffered little damage in the first battle, but Union troops sacked the home and fields during the Second Manassas. For the damages Congress awarded Robinson \$1,249 by a Private Act of March 3, 1873. Robinson House, as it appeared in 1861. The present structure is not original, though a section of it dates to about 1883.